Williams Solid Again in 8-2 Victory

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JACKSONVILLE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee's John Williams worked seven scoreless innings, with Brett Carroll collecting four hits and Marcus Taylor driving in three runs, as the Blue Raiders evened their three-game series against Jacksonville State with an 8-2 victory Saturday afternoon at Rudy Abbott Field. The Blue Raiders scored three times in the first and twice more in the fourth, giving Williams an early cushion. Williams worked seven strong innings, allowing six hits and striking out five. The senior lefthander extended his scoreless innings streak to 13.0 this season and 20.0 in the regular season dating to last year. The top three hitters in the lineup for Middle Tennessee on Saturday - Eric McNamee, Nate Jaggers and Carroll - had six hits, reached base 11 times and scored six runs. Taylor collected a pair of hits and drove in three runs, running his team-leading total to nine for the year. The Blue Raiders (4-1) got off to a fast start in Saturday's game after struggling at the plate Friday night. Leadoff hitter McNamee walked and Jaggers and Carroll followed with singles, loading the bases. McNamee scored on a balk by JSU starter Danny Andres (0-2) before Josh Archer's sacrifice fly to rightfield plated Jaggers. Carroll then scored on Taylor's double just inside the rightfield line for a 3-0 Middle Tennessee lead after a half inning. Carroll doubled to leadoff the third and scored on a pair of wild pitches, giving Williams a four-run cushion. In the fourth McNamee led off with another walk before Jaggers reached on a mental error by JSU third baseman Johny Prosser. McNamee was stealing on the pitch and Jaggers bounced a chopper to Prosser's left. He tried to get the lead runner at second, but McNamee slid in before the ball. A fly ball to right by Carroll moved McNamee to third and Jaggers moved up on a wild pitch, putting two runners in scoring position for Taylor. The sophomore singled up the middle, plating both runners for a 6-0 Blue Raider lead. In the ninth the Blue Raiders added their final two runs of the contest. Chuck Akers drove in Jeff Beachum with a single to right, and Troy Harp scored on a groundout by McNamee. Jacksonville State couldn't do much with Williams (2-0), who spotted the fastball well and mixed in a curveball and a good change-up. The Gamecocks (2-4) had only seven baserunners all day, as Williams did not walk a batter. Only two JSU runners reached third, one in the first and the other in the fourth. Matt Scott worked the final two innings, allowing a pair of hits and two unearned

runs in the ninth. Taylor and Carroll accounted for half of the team's dozen hits in the game, while those two and Beachum each doubled in the victory. Andres, the first of four JSU hurlers in the game, gave up four runs on five hits in 2.1 innings. Middle Tennessee stranded 15 runners in the game, an issue head coach Steve Peterson said must be looked at in the coming games. "We scored some runs today, but we're still having a lot of trouble hitting in the clutch," Peterson said. "We missed some pitches in hitting situations today, fouled them back, and there were other times when we were not aggressive, and that's what we have to look at in the next few games. That has to be addressed, whether it's changing the lineup or with other guys. Peterson said Williams was strong again and had to battle more in his second outing of the season than in his first. "John Williams was very good today. He had another strong outing. He didn't have as much command, but I think the Jacksonville State hitters were more disciplined and did not chase the bad pitches." Williams went seven innings, tossing a few more than 100 pitches, more than the other two starters this season. Peterson said the senior continued to look strong and he wanted to see how far he could go. "John still looked strong in the sixth and we wanted to push him, get his pitch count up," Peterson said. "John's in very good shape and as long as he was effective, we were going to let him continue to get outs." Williams was very happy with his second good outing, especially after getting off to such a rocky start last season, including giving up six runs in just four innings against the Gamecocks to start 2003. "It was hard to adjust to the mound today, and I really couldn't get my curveball going," Williams said. "But I felt like I could place my fastball where I wanted and get them to swing at it." Williams also said his teammates giving him an early lead was a major factor in his solid outing. "Getting those three runs in the first, that was very big for me," he said. "We came out swinging the bats and that gave me a lot of confidence. You can go right after the hitters and don't have to pick at the corners as much when you have the lead and you feel like your teammates are behind you." The rubber game of the series on Sunday begins at 1 p.m. Middle Tennessee continues its eight-game road trip next weekend with a three-game series at Southeastern Louisiana in Hammond, La. **GAME NOTES**

Saturday was an historic afternoon, as the Blue Raiders wore their new blue jerseys, the first differentiation in uniform in more than 30 years ... Newcomer Eric McNamee was the leadoff hitter in the contest, his first game in the leadoff spot this season. He extended his hitting streak to five games with a single in the fourth ... Junior Brett Carroll equaled his career-high with four hits in the game.

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